



PRESS RELEASE

Attorney General Frosh Joins Bipartisan Coalition Urging Video Streaming Industry to Protect Young Viewers from Tobacco Usage *AGs Provide Policy Guidelines to Streaming Industry to Combat Increasing Use of Tobacco Products by Young People*

BALTIMORE, MD (August 7, 2019) – Maryland Attorney General Brian E. Frosh today joined a bipartisan coalition of 43 attorneys general [urging the streaming industry](#) to limit tobacco use in their video content. Due to the growing use of tobacco products among teens, the attorneys general urge the streaming industry to take proactive steps to protect the lives of young viewers. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of middle and high school students using e-cigarettes rose from 2.1 million in 2017 to 3.6 million in 2018.

“It’s dangerous that entertainment meant for, and marketed to children, shows high rates of tobacco usage despite decades of proof that this increases the risk that young viewers become addicted,” said Attorney General Frosh. “It’s time that the entertainment industry take responsibility for its content and limit displays of tobacco use—ideally for all audiences, but at minimum for content aimed at children.”

In 2012, the U.S. Surgeon General concluded that watching movies with tobacco imagery increases the likelihood that adolescents will become smokers. In their letter, the attorneys general urge the video streaming industry to adopt the following policies to protect young viewers from the ill effects of tobacco content:

- Eliminate or exclude tobacco imagery in all future original streamed content for young viewers, including any content rated TV-Y, TV-Y7, TV-G, TV-PG, TV-14, G, PG, and PG-13, and ensure that any promotional material such as previews, trailers, image galleries, and clips be tobacco-free. Content with tobacco imagery should be rated TV-MA or R, and only recommended to adult viewers. ^[1]_{SEP}
- Only “recommend” or designate *tobacco-free* content for children, adolescents, families, and general audiences.
- Improve or offer parental controls that are effective, prominent, and easy-to-use, and that allow parents and guardians specifically to restrict access to all content with tobacco content, regardless of rating.
- Mitigate the negative influence of tobacco content, from whatever source and with any rating, by streaming strong anti-smoking and/or anti-vaping public service announcements, as appropriate, before all videos with tobacco content.

In 1998, attorneys general across the nation fought to enter into the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement, which imposed major restrictions on tobacco company marketing practices and prohibits advertising aimed at youth. This included banning the advertisement of tobacco products on TV shows, movies, and other video content. Despite the ban, studies by the public health organization Truth Initiative found a high rate of tobacco content in streamed videos that are popular with young viewers. In particular, the study discovered high rates of tobacco usage in TV-Y and TV-PG shows. Further, a 2018 study found the streamed videos that are most popular with young viewers feature higher rates of tobacco content than programs shown on traditional television. A 2019 report by the Truth Initiative showed that the danger has only grown in the past year.

Smoking remains the number one preventable killer in the United States and causes over 480,000 deaths per year. Reducing youth access to tobacco products in Maryland has been an important initiative of the Attorney General's office. Preventing kids from starting to smoke will keep them smoke free as adults is among the reasons the Maryland Office of the Attorney General filed suit in 1996 against the tobacco companies and recommended Maryland join the historic Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement in 1998. From retail and online stings to agreements with national retailers regarding best-selling practices, the Attorney General has made the reduction of youth access to tobacco products a major priority.

In sending today's letters to 14 top streaming video services, Attorney General Frosh was joined by the attorneys general of Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Northern Mariana Islands, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Tennessee, U.S. Virgin Islands, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin.